

# *The Elementary English Review*

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VOL. XVI

MAY 1939

No. 5

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## FEATURE ARTICLES

The Mechanics of Writing for Little Children.....JEAN AYER

"Disarm the Hearts" .....MARION EDMAN

Books on Other Lands for Second Grade Literature..MARY G. SULLIVAN

Problems of Teaching English in the Elementary Schools  
GARIBALDI M. LAPOLLA

A Phonics Manual for Primary and Remedial Teachers..GEORGE SPACHE

Vocabulary Problems in the Elementary School.....J. C. SEEGER

The Textbook Clinic (Shop Talk).....J. KENDRICK NOBLE

Recent Books for Boys and Girls (Reviews).....J. L. CERTAIN

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## THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

C. C. CERTAIN, *Editor*

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# The Elementary English Review

C. C. Certain, *Editor*

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## The Course of Study in Elementary School English

Reading Literature  
Book Selection  
School Libraries  
Book Reviews

Composition Spelling  
Grammar  
Essentials of Speech  
and Writing  
Standard Tests  
Test Procedures and  
Remedial Drills

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# THE ELEMENTARY ENGLISH REVIEW

VOL. XVI

MAY 1939

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## The Mechanics of Writing for Little Children

JEAN AYER\*  
New York City

IF YOU CAN write for children and want to break into a field where there is a real need for books, try writing for the group that is still — in school years — between the kindergarten and the fourth grade.

"But," I can hear someone—several someones—saying, "the children's departments in book stores are crowded with books for younger children!"

This is true, but there is one decided lack. There are plenty of picture books and there are plenty of books for adults to read to children; but the books that the average child between the ages of six and nine can read to himself are very limited in number — if one excludes school readers, basal and supplementary. The criticism that they are over-difficult may also be applied to most of the periodicals designed for children.

This situation, as related to books, was first made publicly evident some years ago when the *Winnetka Graded Book List*<sup>1</sup> was published. In this list seven hundred books for children of all

ages were classified, as the result of an extensive testing procedure, not according to the actual school grades of the children reading them, but according to the grades to which the children's actual reading ability corresponded. The classification covered grades three through eight.

Of the seven hundred books listed, only fourteen were found suited to the reading ability of the third grade, that is, to the reading ability of the child with a mental age of eight years. For the nine-year-olds—the fourth grade—there were ninety-six books on the list. The reason that the classification did not include grades below the third was that no books, other than readers, were found that first-grade and second-grade pupils of normal ability could read.

In the years that have passed since the *Winnetka List* was published, there has been some alleviation of the situation, due to the large number of supplementary readers that have been issued for the lower grades. But public libraries do not buy readers to any great extent; and readers are not, if recognized as such, bought for birthday or Christmas gifts.

\*Teacher, editor, author. Latest books: *Donald Duck and His Friends* (with Walt Disney). Heath. *Let's Look Around* (with A. I. Gates) Macmillan. In press.

<sup>1</sup> Washburne, Carleton, and Vogel, Mabel. *Winnetka Graded Book List*. American Library Association, 1926.

They are not, ordinarily, carried in book stores because the difference in the matter of trade discount between textbooks and regulation juvenile books makes this somewhat unpracticable. So the younger child who goes to his own book shelves or to the children's room of a public library is not likely to find much that he can read. He must depend upon what he can gain from picture books and from the joys of the story hour or—if he is fortunate—from hearing books read aloud at home.

His parents and friends who go to a book store for his Christmas or birthday gifts will be likely to buy books that must be read to him. No one can object to this. A child should hear much oral reading since his ability to grasp ideas develops much faster than his reading ability; but he should also have the fun of beginning early and out of school to read some books for himself if only to make him feel that reading to himself is a satisfying thing to do.

If there were more material and more varied material easily available that they could actually read for themselves, there would probably be fewer small children looking upon reading as a distasteful activity and less occasion for that "remedial" work in reading of which we hear as a necessity in relation to numerous students all the way from the first grade to the university.

My suggestion is that writers of juvenile books who normally produce material suited to children in grades above the fifth—as most of them do—try writing an occasional book for the child of six, seven, or eight years to read to himself. To do this, the writer would need to follow some such simplifying procedure as is used by the authors of primary readers, but this should not be impossible. The purpose of this article

is to offer some suggestions to writers who wish to follow such a procedure.

Writing very simply is not easy. The effort to tell a story engagingly while using a very limited vocabulary is likely to reduce the author to a state of mind resembling that of the ragged child in one of Wolff's cartoons who, examining a cook book, commented sadly, "This book doesn't give any fancy dishes you can make with bread and water." It is almost equally difficult to prepare an engaging book for young children while using only the bread and water of short sentences and limited vocabulary.

Then, too, authors of juvenile books sometimes feel that writing for beginners is a little beneath their dignity. At least they feel this till they try to do it and learn that it's an extremely difficult thing to do at all well.

Some years ago an author of several stories for girls came to see me at the suggestion of her publisher. Her books had all up to that time been suited to children of high-school age. Her publisher had suggested that she try to reach a larger sales field by writing a book for younger children, and, in that connection, had asked her to talk with me. This was because I, as an editor of textbooks, had had a good deal of experience in simplifying material submitted for publication.

"I can think of subjects," she said, "that would be suitable for younger children; but I don't believe I could write in simpler language than I ordinarily use in my books and produce anything that would not sound artificial."

"Yet," I said, "when you talk you probably adapt what you have to say quite unconsciously to the ability to understand of the people you are addressing. If you cultivate the acquaintance of younger children, you will find yourself beginning to adapt what you write to their point



of view. A good idea," I went on, "would be for you to visit a school class of the age for which you want to write. If you did this for a few days, you would gain a sense of the limitations of such a group that would be very valuable to you. It would help, too, if you were to read or skim several readers suited to the grade age for which you want to write. Use recently published books in preference to older ones. Some of the older books are not well graded and are too difficult.

"When you write your story, pretend that you are writing it for the children you have been watching. After the first draft is completed, read it through and simplify wherever you can do this without weakening your narrative or spoiling the rhythm of your writing. You will find that you can often shorten sentences, divide long paragraphs into short ones, and substitute easier words for hard ones. In the last connection," I went on innocently, "you should have a copy of Thorndike's *The Teachers' Word Book*.<sup>2</sup> That gives the rating as to difficulty of the 20,000 words most commonly used in written matter."

The author rose to her feet. "I have no doubt," she said, "that some of your suggestions are good; but I shall certainly *not* stultify my writing by the use of one of those absurd word lists." She was so indignant and departed so promptly that I am sure she heard not a word of my defence of Dr. Thorndike's excellent work. I have wondered, sometimes, if she regarded the use of Noah Webster's well-known word list also as stultifying. The fact remains that she has written since that time several much simpler books than her earlier ones. These books, whatever the reason, are not only easier to read than her earlier stories; they are,

also, in the opinion of competent critics, much better books.

I have, however, talked with a number of writers for children who seemed to feel that there was something all wrong about using one of the standard word lists as an aid in simplifying their material sufficiently to enable young children to read it.

This attitude may be due, in some instances, to the unpleasant effect produced by the so-called "adaptations" of excellent juvenile material to be found in many reading books and in some regulation juveniles. Not infrequently in the case of primary readers these adaptations bear, aside from a thin thread of narrative and, possibly, a few names, no resemblance to the original. They are included apparently to make it possible to show in the table of contents the names of children's authors of good standing and to permit the publisher of the reader to claim that his particular primer, first reader, or second reader contains only literature of high standing. Often in such cases, the word "adapted" fails to accompany the selection, and there is thus no indication that the garbled version is not as originally written. Such procedures are manifestly unfair to the author and unfair to those who read the altered material. It seems strange that publishers do not protect their copyrighted property more carefully.

In other cases of adaptation—especially when the material is more advanced—the original narrative is recognizable, but the literary quality, the rhythm and the rightness of word choice and placing have been ruined by a mechanical replacing of the difficult words by easier ones and by the breaking up of long sentences into shorter ones without consideration of the effect upon the reader's mind and ear.

<sup>2</sup>Thorndike, E. L., *The Teacher's Word Book*. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, New York. Revised Edition, 1930.

Consider, for example, the following modification of a bit from Hans Andersen's "The Nightingale."

The original translation reads:

The sun shone upon him through the windows, when he awoke refreshed and restored. Not one of the servants had yet returned, for they all thought he was dead; only the Nightingale still sat beside him and sang.

The adaptation says:

He woke up feeling much better. The sun was shining through the windows. The servants had not come back. But the Nightingale sat beside him and sang.

People who read such altered material with distress should not blame the word list the adaptor has used. It would be as sensible to blame Webster's dictionary. The fault lies with the person who used the word list.

A certain amount of adaptation is undoubtedly necessary in order to supply suitable material for children learning to read and for the student whose mental age falls considerably below his chronological age; but the adapting should be done by persons with at least a reasonable amount of feeling for literary style and with a reasonable respect for the author's rights in the matter, whether the author is living now or dead these hundred years.

I cannot, offhand, think of any situation that justifies the modification of a piece of literature to such an extent that its style, rhythm, and narrative outline are lost. If no literature can be found suitable for use in a primer or other reader without such undesirable alteration, then original material should be prepared. There would, of course, be less occasion for offending in this way if more material were written with little children definitely in mind.

Assuming that a writer for children is willing to attack the task of preparing a book that can be read by the normal child

between the ages of six and nine, how shall he—or more probably she—proceed to make such a book?

Books for children in the second and third grades in school—the seven-year-olds and eight-year-olds—are usually, except for large type, short sentences, short paragraphs, and numerous illustrations, like books for adults in page make-up. In preparing a book for children of the ages mentioned, the suggestions I gave to the author who didn't like word lists should be followed. For use in simplifying vocabulary, three word lists will be found especially helpful: Thorndike's *The Teachers Word Book* (Revised Edition)<sup>3</sup>, *A Reading Vocabulary for the Primary Grades* (Revised Edition), by Arthur I. Gates,<sup>4</sup> and the International Kindergarten Union list.<sup>5</sup>

Numerous word lists have been published, nearly all valuable for one purpose or another, but these three are probably the most effective for the special purpose indicated. A large majority of the words used in any piece of writing for children of first, second, or third-grade reading ability which they are to read to themselves should be found included in the Gates list of 1811 words, in the first 2000 words of the Thorndike list, or in the 2500 words of the I. K. U. list.

Let us suppose you have followed the procedure outlined. When you have simplified your material as much as you can without injuring it, have it typed—using if possible a typewriter with rather large letters. (Do not try to meet the situation by using all capitals, however.) Have a number of copies made. Then arrange to have a school class of the in-

<sup>3</sup>Thorndike. *Op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup>Gates. Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, New York.

<sup>5</sup>Child Study Committee. *Vocabulary of Children before Entering the First Grade*. International Kindergarten Union, Washington, 1928.

dedicated grade read it or selected parts of it, orally, while you listen and make note of difficulties and comments. Don't let the children know that you are the author unless you are sure the situation can be so handled that this knowledge will not affect their comments.

An arrangement for a reading test of this sort is usually not hard to make through principal or supervisor. Intelligent supervisors and teachers often welcome opportunities for varied reading experiences for their pupils, provided an arrangement is made sufficiently long in advance to preclude interference with activities already under way. Children always enjoy feeling that they are helping to make a book or a story. Their comments—if the classroom is one where spontaneity is not discouraged—will be very helpful, and it will be easy to note from their oral reading what points are likely to give difficulty.

If for any reason you cannot arrange to test your material in a school class or with some other group of children suitable in reading ability, it is possible to use some mechanical system of checking. Indeed it is wise to use such a device in addition to the actual testing with children. Such a procedure, while it will tell you nothing about the amount of interest your material will arouse, will enable you to judge, with some degree of accuracy, whether or not children of the mental age you have in mind can read it.

In several school systems, methods of checking books for difficulty have been devised. One that is fairly well known and which seems to be reasonably satisfactory in its results is the "Winnetka Chart for Determining Grade Placement of Children's Books."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Morphett, M. V., Weedon, V., Washburne, C. "Winnetka Chart for Grade Placement of Children's Books." Public Schools, Winnetka, Illinois.

This chart is planned only for the testing of prose. So if you are writing or compiling poetry for children, you must depend upon a "poison squad," as Lucy Fitch Perkins used to label the groups of youngsters on whom she tried her stories.

When your book is completed and you and your editor are discussing illustrations and details of format, it is well to remember that pictures in books for younger children should illuminate the text—help to make the meaning of the reading matter clearer. While they should add to the beauty of the book the fact that they have this definitely utilitarian purpose should never be forgotten.

Suggestions made up to this point have been applicable largely to writing done for children able to do the type of reading suited to the normal child in the high second grade in school or in more advanced grades than the second. Suppose you wish to write for the child who has had only a half year or less of instruction in reading—the child who has a mental age of six and a half years or more and is therefore intellectually qualified to learn to read. In that case, certain other features must be taken into consideration.

Even though you are writing a regulation juvenile and not a textbook, it will probably be wise to plan your book with a page make-up similar to that found in primers and first readers. As you will note on examining them, these books are set up somewhat differently from books for older children.

Persons writing pre-primers, primers, and first readers, prepare their manuscripts in dummy form. That is, they put on each page exactly what is to be on that page in the published book and they arrange the sentences just as they are to appear in the book.

The sentences are all short and are made up of simple easy words. Each sentence begins on a new line. For example:

"Meow, meow, meow!  
I am lost.  
I am lost.  
What can I do?"

Since it is easier for the eye to read reasonably short lines than long ones, primer and first reader lines do not exceed four inches. Since eighteen point type is commonly used in these books, a line does not usually accommodate more than thirty-two letters and spaces.

When a line is so long that it has to turn, it is customary to break it, not at the extremity, but between ideational units of the sentence. For example, we do not write—

Mr. Brown went away with the basket.

If we are following primer or first reader procedure we arrange the sentence in this way:

Mr. Brown went away  
with the basket.

We do not write:

"Guess what I have," said the big policeman.

Instead, the sentence is arranged in this way:

"Guess what I have,"  
said the big policeman.

Or there may be a division between subject and predicate, as:

All the children  
looked at the big basket.

Though it is not invariably done, some writers of primers and first readers indicate paragraphs by extra spacing between the last line of one paragraph and the first line of the next, as:

"What do you call the cat,  
Uncle David?" said Nick.

"I call him Albert-Edward,"  
said Uncle David.

"Mew-mew!"  
said Albert-Edward.

This probably adds to clarity and doubtless helps in the unconscious developing of a paragraph sense. Its only disadvantage is that it uses up a good deal of space.

In some of the older primers and first readers a type of indenting known as "hanging indention" is used. The following is an example:

The dog ran down the road  
with the doll.  
The children ran down the  
road after the dog.

Almost none of the newer reading books use this type of indention. It is mentioned here merely as a matter of academic interest and because some persons reading this article will recall using primary readers that were set up in this way. Apparently it was thought at one time that the hanging type of indention helped to simplify the problem of the child beginning to read. There seems no evidence, however, that this is the case.

It is customary to use rather generous leading between the lines in primary readers. When eighteen point type is used one doesn't find more than fifteen or sixteen lines on an ordinary 12mo page, and fifteen—in the interest of clarity—is probably better than sixteen.

The page format for primary books outlined in this article has been developed by various people over a long period of years as a result of experience rather than of scientific research. No complete and comprehensive study has yet been made as to the relationship of size of type, length of line, and amount of leading (space between lines) to ease in reading. That such a study will eventually be made is a consummation devoutly to be wished. However, the trend of such studies as have been published up to the present time favors, for beginners, large type, short lines, and ample leading.



In writing primers and first readers it is customary to use frequently words that have once been presented and to use new words sparingly. When a new word occurs it is repeated in the text as soon as possible. In basal primers—those with which the actual reading work is begun—an average of less than two new words to a page is often preserved. The words used in a primer are largely—aside from proper names—such as can be found in the first thousand of the Gates list<sup>7</sup> and the first thousand of the Thorndike list.<sup>8</sup> Words for first readers will extend to some extent into the second thousand of each of these lists. The vocabulary of material written for children of second-grade ability may include words from the entire Gates list and from the first two thousand of the Thorndike list. Books for children of third-grade reading ability should have a vocabulary largely derived from the complete Gates list and from the first three thousand of the Thorndike list. In juveniles written for children of these ages, the number of new words per page might well be limited though not with the rigidity that characterizes most primary reading books.

It should be remembered that the wise plan is to write your stories first and check them later by the word lists, substituting, when it is possible, easy words for harder ones. Anyone writing very simply will automatically use for the most part a vocabulary that will be found duplicated in the Gates list and in the early part of the Thorndike list. Sentences must, of course, be kept short and uninvolved.

"But how," I hear someone inquiring, "is a child to develop a satisfactory vo-

<sup>7</sup> *Op. cit.*

<sup>8</sup> *Op. cit.*

cabulary, if he reads books which give him so limited a number of new words?"

The answer is that if you give the average child a book with an over-heavy vocabulary, he cannot read it anyhow; so offering it to him will retard rather than aid the development of his vocabulary. He should be given books to read which *with reasonable effort* he can read. But—and this is important—he should *hear* much reading of material that he cannot read to himself, but can understand. This will aid in developing his vocabulary and his taste for good literature. He should hear much poetry read and should be encouraged—in pleasant ways—to memorize it and to make up rhymes of his own. This recommendation is made not only because of the aesthetic development engendered, but also because the study of poetry is an invaluable aid in the development of phonetic ability.

As has been said earlier, should always be borne in mind in preparing books for little children that the illustrations must help out the text. They should therefore be numerous, of good size, and realistic rather than merely decorative. Color and outline should be clear, and minor details should not be so numerous as to confuse the child as to the main features of the illustration.

The author who attempts to write for little children's reading must approach the task not with a high-hat attitude but with a feeling that the short sentences and limited vocabulary with which he must work and the immature but expectant minds to which he must appeal constitute not so much a handicap as a challenge—a challenge to the best his imagination and ingenuity have to offer.

# "Disarm the Hearts"

## Developing a Feeling of World Friendship\*

MARION EDMAN

Supervising Instructor, Language Education  
Detroit Public Schools

THE BASIS upon which the proper attitude of children toward the peoples of other countries is built is an understanding of the daily life and habits of these peoples. Walt Whitman has expressed this concept well:

It seems to me that there are men in other lands,  
yearning and thoughtful,  
It seems to me I can look over and behold them  
in Germany, Italy, France, Spain.  
Or far, far away in China, or in Russia, or Japan,  
talking other dialects.  
And it seems to me if I could know these men  
I should become attached to them, as I do to men  
in my own land.

The approach toward world understanding through a feeling of familiarity with the peoples of the world, then, seems to be the best approach possible for young children. They cannot grasp the significance of peace treaties and international alliances, but they can understand that children in Japan are like themselves in their love for their toys; that children in Spain enjoy playing certain games in the streets, as they do; that children in Germany watch for Kriss Kringle as they do for Santa Claus; and understanding these traits and similar childlike ones, they realize that children all over the world are much alike in the essentials of life and that realization makes the peoples of the whole world kin.

The types of projects which I shall describe include reading, correspondence, posters, projects, exhibits, and miscellaneous ones. I am forced to touch on each but briefly.

\*Read before The National Council of Teachers of English, November, 1938.

### Reading

A great many excellent books have recently been published which describe the everyday events of child life in other lands in an attractive yet realistic manner. The books cover even the remote places of the world and are to be found in practically every school and public library. I shall suggest only a few of many good titles:

For the very young child:

Bemelmans. *Hansi*—Tyrol.

Dalglish. *Relief's Rocker*—Nova Scotia.

Beskow. *Olle's Ski Trip*—Sweden.

For the Middle grades

Sperry. *One Day with Manu*—South Seas.

Sperry. *One Day with Tuktu*—Esquimo.

De Leeuw. *Java Jungle Tales*—Tropics.

Van Stockum. *Day on Skates*—Holland.

Lattimore. *Little Pear*—China.

For the upper grades:

Seredy. *Good Master*—Hungary.

Lewis. *Young Fu*—China.

Adams. *Wisp*—Ireland.

Bibliographies of suitable books:

American Library Association. *Children's Catalog*

Mahony and Whitney. *Realms of Gold*

Mahony and Whitney. *Five Years of Children's Books*

*We Circle the Globe* (Record of reading in 9A class Hutchins Intermediate School, Detroit, Michigan)

#### Local Library lists

Reading may be organized as a unified project. Mrs. Ada Madden, Supervisor of Elementary Grades, Watertown, New York, reports a reading unit entitled, "Around the World Book Flight," in the sixth grade. A room exhibit was the culmination of the unit. A large map of the world gave the locale of the books read. Lists of favorite authors, favorite characters, general bibliography, new words, etc., were posted on backgrounds representing books. Many titles dealing with many countries were attractively displayed about the room.

The teacher of a fifth grade in Minneapolis reports the use of articles in *The Red Cross Magazine* and the *Junior Red Cross News* as the basis for a group discussion on world conditions. The entire program is reproduced in the November, 1938, issue of the *Minnesota Journal of Education*.

#### Correspondence

This type of teaching is very easy to develop, for children like the romance of writing to unseen friends. Opportunities for initiating a letter writing project can grow out of reading, or the social studies, or can be introduced as an entity in itself. One group of children in Detroit began writing to children in Bulgaria as a result of their interest in *Dobry*. Bulgarian children do not write English, but a complete translation accompanies each letter. Exhibits of toys, pressed flowers, and pictures have been exchanged.

Another letter writing project in De-

troit has been going on steadily for seven years and grew out of a question, sent in 1931, by a girls' school in London as to why the United States did not join the League of Nations. The eighth grade class to whom the letter was addressed began at once to find explanations, and the reply letters mustered all the reasons possible for our non-participation. Since then, there have been many exchanges of letters, booklets, and exhibits. One of the booklets sent to London gave a kind of history of the City of Detroit—its various industries, outstanding public buildings, a map of the city, and a description of Greenfield Village. Each topic was discussed by individual pupils. The cover was the work of one pupil, but grew out of class discussion: two girls, one bearing the British flag and the other the American flag joined hands across the globe.

Several interesting booklets have come from England. One of these showed a great number of pictures of the Jubilee Celebration of George V. The children of our schools got, perhaps, a better understanding of the feeling with which the British people regard their royal house through the booklet and through the letters of the children than any explanations attempted by adults could have given them. One child wrote:

Our school is in a muddle as we are having it all done up to look nice. We are having a house built so that we can learn how to become good house-keepers. We have a lovely stage in the hall and we are going to have a number of nice things in our school . . . On May 6, there was much rejoicing as our King and Queen have ruled the throne for 25 years. They both rode through the streets with their family and numbers of people came from all over the world to see them. Decorations were put up.

#### Posters

A poster prominently displayed in the halls of one of the Detroit schools bears the legend: "World Peace Begins with Us." A large reproduction of the school-house occupies the center of the poster

and on either side are the reminders: "Act Kindly," and "Be Friendly." Paths lead to names of various types of school and community contacts. The teachers plan to change the names of the contacts until they are expanded to world citizenship. In a second school, the teacher has a large map of the world pasted on the bulletin board. Whenever a story appears in *Scholastic* which has a foreign scene as background, a typed reference to it is placed on the bulletin board and a bit of bright colored wool connects it with its proper locality.

#### *Projects*

Albums of pictures of local interest, of historical topics, and of national parks have been exchanged with various countries. Postage stamp collections always arouse interest in foreign countries and this interest may be used as the basis for the discussion of the people who live in each.

#### *Exhibits*

Exhibits may include articles made or gathered by children. An example of the former type is a set of models of the various peace monuments of the world made in Watertown, New York. The models included the Peace Portal at Blaine, Washington; the Christ of the Andes in South America; the Postal-Union Monument at Berne, Switzerland, and others. For the second type, children gather articles which illustrate the native life of people. In one school in Detroit a show case which I saw recently had, by actual count, sixty-one household articles used by the people of Holland. These varied from wooden shoes to embroidered egg warmers.

#### *Special programs*

Occasions for school programs emphasizing a world outlook are Armistice Day; Promotion Exercises; Pan-American Day (April 14); Good Will Day (May

18); and others of a similar nature. On the last named date, the children of Cardiff, Wales, broadcast a message of good will to children of the world. At the present time, the children of sixty nations are responding. Five years ago, the United States became a participant in this broadcast.

#### *Community Contacts*

The children of many of our schools represent a number of nationality groups and there is direct opportunity to point out the contributions made to this country by the cultures of each. Recently a highly educated Swiss woman in one of our communities appeared before a group of school children in native costume and spoke of the customs of her land. The fact that she had personally presented Jane Withers with a doll dressed in Swiss costume made her a personage of great importance in the eyes of the children. The principal plans to invite other members of the community who represent different nationalities to talk to the children during the school year.

Another group of children in Detroit are dressing dolls in the native costume of several countries. These dolls are to be presented to the Good Fellows for distribution among the needy at Christmas time. As they sew, one member reads aloud stories of children in other lands. So far they have read parts of the Abbes' *Around the World in Eleven Years*, and Williams' *Robin and Jean in France*, and Brink's *Anything Can Happen on the River*. The teacher has prepared a bibliography from which titles may be chosen.

#### *Sources of materials on international good will*

Organizations sponsoring world friendship

American Junior Red Cross, Washington, D. C.

(Continued on page 190)



# Books on Other Lands

## For Second Grade Literature

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WHEN I FIRST taught school, I accepted the generally held viewpoint that children of other lands, their customs and activities, were a major interest for story time and a school room library. Later this was put in the background because of the many interests that I felt more urgent and important. However, lately, I have again given serious thought to the question, and have come to feel that books which create a sympathetic feeling for children of other nationalities must have their place when planning children's reading.

As a young teacher I was naturally influenced by the constant use of material on other lands, but not as much as some new teachers were. Fortunately for me I was placed in an environment that escaped the rigidity of the past. The seeds of an activity program were planted very early. I had children from difficult surroundings, with little English, with poor backgrounds and few advantages, but I was in a school that was in the vanguard for sympathy for the child and his needs. At a time when many schools resembled prisons, we went gayly forth to circus parades, to see Santa, to ride on the Swan Boats, and to play by the river. We had a May Pole on the roof, made daisy chains, visited other rooms freely and shared toys and experiences. I experienced things first and formulated theories later—a happy situation for establishing sincere convictions.

Literature as something that filled a real need, as a means for proper use of

leisure and for the enriching of everyday interests of children naturally lead to the centering of interest in things very near to the children. The sociological side of literature, as it influenced children's relation to the people close at hand, became more important as the child's development was considered to be at least as important as subject matter.

This changed viewpoint shut out the old emphasis on children of other lands through lack of time. Moreover, I had long felt that the constant playing up of differences between countries was not wholesome for little children.

I had an added reason for slighting stories of other countries. I had a strong feeling that the primary teacher should not try to cover every possible subject no matter how worthy. I felt that the teachers coming later should have classes approach geography with a zest and delight that was not dimmed by earlier immature concepts gained from an early study of manners and customs.

I still feel these points are vital. But, whereas we may put subject matter in water tight compartments we can't put children in them. Children only spend a part of their lives in school and they do not spend the rest of it in a vacuum. They meet many forces outside of school. They do not wait for a subject to appear in the course of study, but produce full fledged prejudices and racial antagonisms. Little second grade children adopt the viewpoints of adults and group their peers by race and religion.

We must face the issue. Hate seems to have been let loose in the world. We must help these children to have a fellow feeling for children everywhere. The fatherhood of God is an empty thing without the brotherhood of man. If seeds of tolerance and world friendship are to be sown, they must be rooted early before unthinking adults make the soil barren. I still feel that over-emphasis on differences in considering other nationalities with young children is unsound. I still feel that many aspects of life in other places should be given a later, more mature treatment. I still am hampered by lack of time in allowing the literature period to give life to much of the course of study. Yet I feel that the times demand that I give emphasis to literature that develops sympathy with and knowledge of other people.

How can I overcome these drawbacks? Three factors help to a solution.

First, the attitude I wish to foster depends more on emotions, feelings and atmosphere than on facts, manners and customs. Therefore, one book may easily fill two purposes.

Secondly, the present wealth of fine children's books helps. Lovely books, cleverly written, beautifully illustrated, founded on a knowledge of children are available. The publishers try to meet the needs of progressive education without sacrificing beauty of language or worth of content.

Thirdly, stupid adults may stir up misunderstanding and blunder towards war. Dictators may change the map of the world. But children the world over thrill to the same interests and situations.

Therefore many situations which I think of as near my children, really have a universal appeal. My solution is frequently to use a book which enriches a unit of work and has a foreign atmos-

phere as well. In fact the ideal book for this grade should have the subject matter the strong element and have the foreign setting an incidental thing.

Books translated from other languages are helpful from this standpoint. They were written with a child's interest as the theme, and the fact that it was a foreign child that first enjoyed the book is an added interest. The child hearing the story thinks "So French children see rabbits, too," and feels a friendly tie to those far-off children who live in a country side that can produce so fascinating a rabbit. There are three delightful French books that do this. They deal with a duck, a rabbit and a squirrel. *Plouf the Little Wild Duck*, *Fluff the Little Wild Rabbit*, and *Pom Pom the Red Squirrel*.<sup>\*</sup> The children in my class base much of their nature work on walks in the park. Ducks are very important in our scheme of things. Suddenly a new book with delightful pictures appears. The children greet the little duck as a valued friend. I tell them that the book was first written in French and that a French artist painted the lovely pictures. At Easter time we met Fluff the rabbit with the same friendly glow toward far-off children who knew him first.

At Halloween fairies hold the stage. Fairy pictures were in demand. Elsa Beskow's *Fairy Children of the Wood* was put on the book shelf. Each day a page of her charming illustrations was shown. I told the children about Swedish fairies. I explained that children in Sweden loved the book. This book has so many lovely nature bits that it has been referred to often. Later the beautiful *The Sun Egg* was read and enjoyed. The children now look upon Elsa Beskow as an old friend.

At Christmas, *The Toy Maker* from the German was used. Our chief interest

<sup>\*</sup>See the bibliography, page 183.

was a tree being used to make children's toys, but the foreign setting was of added interest.

The *Snipp Snapp Snurr* books are another example of the appeal of a common interest. We had been interested in number situations. Snipp, Snapp and Snurr were little boys that had a pig bank and helped at home to earn money. The Swedish setting was just one more thing to remember about them.

*The Seven Crowns* has the same interest in a child's money problems against a Danish background.

There are many fine books written by American authors about children of other countries. They naturally stress habits and customs. However this is not too prominent as they are written by authors who have a sense of the universality of worthwhile interests. These books make a first appeal by giving added information and delight about a well known subject.

*The Story of Ping* is an outstanding example. In the text, a duck's adventures are of paramount importance. In the pictures China becomes a fascinating place. One acquires a warm feeling for any country said to harbor such an outstanding duck. I am glad to have a book with this incidental Chinese background. Several times, when I have mentioned China in connection with some bit of beauty such as gold fish or flowers, I have had an instant unfavorable reaction from some child. A book dwelling on odd and strange customs would increase the child's feeling of rather sinister differences, but a little river boy who rescues our duck hero from being eaten — he is worth knowing.

*A Star for Hansi* is a splendid book to read at Christmas time. This charming story, with beautiful pictures, includes

the grandmother's story as well as that of a modern child. There is a lovely Christmas spirit and a rule for spending money.

The children's Christmas interests always include reindeer. *Children of the North Lights* might be considered at this season. Both the text and pictures are splendid.

"The White Blackbird" from *The Peep-Show Man* (Padraic Colum) is an unusual Easter story. The birds mentioned make it a good spring story. The lonely little boy who longs for an absent father has a counterpart in many little boys and girls in broken homes in Boston. The story takes place in Ireland.

Two of the nature experiences that may be had in any school room are a fish bowl and plants (bulbs, dish gardens, etc). Children often like to name the fish and to tell their story. Some of ours were in an outdoor pool all summer. When imagination and a sense of fun have been aroused, *The Runaway Sardine* might be produced. That fish escaped in Brittany. Bulbs have an interesting history. Holland figures in it. It is well to think of other countries as having contributed beauty for us. *To Market to Market* might be used. It is a picture book that introduces Holland to little people. *Klaas and Jansje* might be put on the nature shelf. It treats of a modern, up-to-date Holland. The pictures are fine. The introduction says, "Our Holland is a land of dancing tulips, whirling mills, of busy folks and happy modern boys and girls just like yourselves." There are two chapters on bulbs, "The Sleeping Flowers" and "Pigs for Bulbs." There is a delightful old Dutch verse describing a happy busy family on page 137.

A book which weaves an imaginative story about the little Japanese figures in a dish garden is *The Little Garden*.

In our day factual knowledge is being presented in such an interesting way that there is danger that we may shut out the strange and old in fiction, especially in fairy tales and folk lore. The very fine new readers help to keep some balance. The children were reading the table of contents of a reader in a search for Easter stories. They found one about the Easter rabbit. A little boy read the title and then, "a German folk tale." He asked what it meant. We looked for other stories which came to us from other lands. Such reading lessons give a splendid chance to trace the origin of habits and customs which are observed by modern children, to definite countries. Stokes has a series of "Picture Tales from Other Lands." In *Picture Tales From Holland* "Why Cats Always Wash After Eating," "The Caterpillar," "The Lark," and "St. Nicholas Eve" might be used. The author heard them told as a child.

Second grade children are often interested in authors and illustrators. In the Fall Book Week or the Spring Book Festival stories might be told of foreign authors and foreign-born American authors when samples of their books are displayed. Those who wrote and drew as children are especially good. This information may be found in *Junior Book of Authors and Contemporary Illustrators of Children's Books*. The following authors and artists might interest the children if the teacher takes care in presenting the facts:

- Elsa Beskow (Sweden)
- Miska Petersham (Hungary)
- Kurt Wiese (Germany — knows China and Australia)
- Elsa Eisgruber (Germany)
- Eleanore Frances Lattimore (Born in China)
- Berta Hader (Mexico)
- Alice Dalgliesh (West Indies. Now

has home in Canada from which come lovely Canadian stories)

- Margery Bianco (England)
- Boris Artzybasheff (Russia)
- Ingri and Edgar Parin D'Aulaire (Norway and Italy)
- Padraic Colum (Ireland)

Wanda Gág (born in Minnesota but had European background—German and Czechoslovakian)

Many American authors and artists wrote children's books after seeing the foreign children close at hand. It is interesting for children to know that people traveling found these children with their pets and toys so lovable that they wrote books about them. Rhea Wells visited the Australian Alps, Spain and Sicily. Emma Brock has done delightful things in many countries. Helen Sewell went to Guam for two happy years as a child.

Of course it is not to be expected that any second-grade teacher will read all the books mentioned in any one year. There are too many other books which are not connected with other lands which should have their place in story time. However there is no reason why most of these books shouldn't be known to the children of any one grade. Any book may be used in library time for the value to be obtained from the pictures. If one book is enjoyed, the other books by the author may be looked at and either the story lightly sketched by the teacher or parts read aloud.

In a room with units of work which vary from year to year, some books would be used to build a unit some years and merely looked at other years. It is important for the teacher to keep an open-minded attitude toward each book and not to pigeonhole it in her mind with any definite approach. Every book has a variety of leads and may touch the children's interests from many angles.



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# Problems of Teaching English In the Elementary Schools\*

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ENGLISH HAS always seemed to me to be one of those things which do not have to be taught at all—like breathing, for instance, or just growing up. For whether we learn one way of saying things or another way of saying things, the chances are that for all practical purposes we shall have acquired enough language at any stage in our lives to obtain what we want, talk with those people who are willing to talk to us, listen to those things we want to hear, and avoid hearing those things to which we desire to be deaf. There is hardly a housewife in an Ozark mountain hamlet with but two or three years of one-room school training who cannot order from the Sears and Roebuck catalogue. There is hardly a housewife in the city of New York or Memphis, with a high school diploma hanging in her sitting room, who need do much better than her Ozark mountain sister.

However, looking at the matter negatively, there are few people, not professional writers, who are not perturbed over the quality of their written English, very few indeed in whose day by day writings the expert master of English cannot detect errors in diction, or spelling, or punctuation.

What I am trying to do is to point out the widespread interest in the use of English in this country, and at the same time to call attention to the numerous disputes over what is and what is not the correct

form in any particular instance. Despite the universality with which certain forms reputedly correct are taught throughout the United States, it seems to be the almost universal impression that great groups of our people are careless in speech, neglectful of proper grammatical standards, incapable of speaking in public, without much resource in phrasing, and generally lacking in the marks of cultured and distinctive utterance.

It would seem as if our schools had failed utterly in developing unexceptionable habits of speech in our population. Has it been so much waste motion, all this wide-flung English teaching in the grades and beyond?

To my mind all the problems of the teaching of English are summed up in the great disparity between the speech and the writing of English as practiced by the great mass of our people and the standards that are held up in the text books and the schools as the "true and only." Our teaching has lacked reality. It has tended to keep alive forms that have been discarded in the normal uses of everyday routine. To me, in consequence, the first problem that presents itself when we consider the status of our teaching of English is how to bridge the gap between an ideal and the reality. Which forms shall we, as English teachers, uphold—those we find in common speech, or those that have been given authenticity by the acknowledged masters of our language in the great books of our literature?

\*Address delivered before The National Council of Teachers of English, in connection with The National Education Association, summer, 1938.

When one considers that practically the entire course of study in a traditional elementary school is, as far as the first three years are concerned, largely a matter of reading, one may seemingly doubt any such large statement as mine, that the teaching of English is far removed from reality. But I need only to call your attention to the prevailing textbooks employed in the first grades of the school. Even those that embody the better practices, only too often deal in subject matter based on the assumption that the only world the child knows is the make-believe world of Little Bo-Peep or Turkey Lurkey.

Content in itself is important, but it is not so important as the language used if we are to face the problem of developing in our children, from the very beginning of their schooling, habits of talking and writing which will result in a satisfactory modicum of correctness and a fair measure of distinction.

Ever since Thorndike published his now famous word list, it has been taken for granted that that list, together with the additions and emendations incorporated into it by Gates and others, represents all the words a child can be expected to know at any given age. Now, I do not mean to belittle the good this list and similar efforts have done. They have done a lot of good. But those who have employed such lists to bring reading more within the scope of a child's ability, have succeeded in creating a condition that is almost as bad as the one they sought to correct. The words that go into a story are chosen only from these lists—words gathered not from the lips of children, not from the writings of children, not from the language used towards children by fathers and mothers and nurses and companions young and old, but from books already in print, from magazines,

newspapers, and books for children written by adults.

One slight proof that the whole question I raise here needs attention is the recent tentative publication in mimeographed form of a survey of words suitable for use among children in the third grade recently conducted in the city schools by one of the W.P.A. projects. The survey indicated that without doubt numerous words can be added to the Gates list without straining the ability of the children. But even this result, desirable as it seems in making possible a freer, more natural literary style for juvenile texts, is still far short of the mark. The words tested were also words that came out of the vocabulary of adults and out of texts already in use.

Of course there can be no objection to employing these lists as aids. But I am making a plea for an even more realistic approach. It is about time we compiled words used *by* children at any given age, not used *for* them or *at* them by teachers and authors no matter how sympathetic. In other words, we have to go into the child's own experiences for our vocabulary, our forms of speech, the material of our texts, and I would go as far as to say even our grammar as it appears in the conversation and dialogue of the story.

I would, as far as possible, have the children construct their own texts. In several schools, successful work in reading has been done without recourse to a series of readers, depending entirely on the reports of children as transcribed by teachers, of their doings at home, their visits to the stores, their accounts of their pets and their games. Each class in a given grade may thus conceivably have its own book based on its own routine of play and living.

I would extend this principle of basing the teaching of English in the lower grades upon the experiences of the children to corrective exercises. The market is flooded with a variety of pamphlets, work-books, pads, all designed to improve the children's written forms. The child is drilled and drilled and drilled and drilled. The pedagogical efforts to render the speech and the composition of our children impeccable are literally Herculean. By the time the children have been graduated from the high schools, they should, to a person, be capable of talking and writing in an ordinarily acceptable manner.

But as a high school teacher of English, as chairman of an English department in one of the largest metropolitan schools, as an instructor in English in one of the city colleges, as an occasional examiner for the Board of Education of New York City, assigned to read papers of candidates for teaching positions in the city schools, I have first-hand information that all the teaching I described must have been woefully bad. The whole process must be gone over again. The high schools have their own work-books; the colleges have their own work-books; the examiners search for errors in the writings of teacher candidates. The percentage of failures for use of improper English is large enough to be amazing. From infancy to adulthood we are all subjected to a process of infinite scrutiny to determine and eliminate sins of speech and writing. In other words, our English training from the elementary grades to the college, has made us error-detectors but has not made us error-proof. It is not a wholesome condition except in so far as it assists publishers in grinding out countless texts in a missionary endeavor to cleanse us of our sins.

I believe the major cause for this con-

dition is to be found in the practice of divorcing teaching from actualities. It was obvious that this was the case at the turn of the century. The grammar books at that time were filled with monstrosities, supposedly examples of common errors. Numerous assaults upon them have resulted in the simplification of these texts and the elimination of items that do not give our children the command of a speech and a writing style reasonably free of gross abnormalities. That much can be granted. But the reform has not gone far enough. Our texts, and even the mimeos made up by teachers themselves, are still too dependent upon a philosophy of English teaching which ought to be almost entirely discarded. It is the philosophy which states that there is a fixed language used mostly by adults, and especially teachers, which is pure and good and desirable, and to which, therefore, all nice little boys and girls must learn to conform. The assumption is that children must be pulled up to adult standards. There is nothing to be said against that as a general thing especially if the adult standards are natural and simple. But I contend that in adopting it as a theory we fail to achieve the maximum of success in the teaching of good English.

What I have said in a general scattered way about reading in the lower grades and the whole body of corrective English work in the next higher grades and beyond applies with equal force to the teaching of the spoken word. I think we all deplore the tendency towards slovenly speech in the nation as a whole. Now, exactly why, considering the vast amount of money and time and energy expended by a gigantic army of school teachers, should there be slovenly speech? Has our own teaching been at fault? Have we failed to use proper methods? In part, yes. I maintain, however, the larger



cause is more subtle. It is the insistence by an over-dignified pedagogy that young children shall be held to rigid standards set up by adults who have a professional interest in a 100% purity. Again, let me repeat. There is no reason why we should not have high standards. There is no reason why we should not compel children to set up for themselves high standards and attain them. But that is a far cry from demanding that the children attain standards above their age levels, above their ability levels, above their psychological levels.

Now this is not a plea for the graduation of the work in oral English or in any other subject. It is merely a plea that we recognize that children at all stages speak in ways that are natural to them at those stages. Our task as teachers is not to compel them to outreach themselves. In the laudable effort to get our children to speak in sounds and in expressions that are understandably good English, we go too far, correct the specific error here and there, insist upon sounds that are not heard in any one locality, labor painfully at distorting the pronunciations and sounds that children are accustomed to, until we create the kind of fear that paralyzes naturalness.

Before proceeding to a positive statement of remedies, I must take up the question of teaching literature and the question of teaching composition in the elementary grades. Again, along broad lines, the teaching of literature to younger children suffers from the blight of the impossible standard. We all know of the person who is always saying to younger people, "Why don't you read a good book instead of that stuff?" This principle is applied to their reading, not to afford children new sources of interest or enjoyment, but to do something for their good. Teachers and textbook makers are equal-

ly guilty. We think too directly in terms either of character-training, of patriotism, of fact-imparting, or of moral uplift, and not sufficiently in terms of child experiences. We all know how much of a bore any piece of literature is that has too obvious a purpose, that is too direct in the presentation of an idea. As adults we shun it, but we continue to force such things upon children. What is worse, however, is that such material is often so palpably out of harmony with the glimpses of the grown-up world vouchsafed to children in radio and on screen and in the home and on the street that it means little or nothing or even seems to be altogether false. They become a piece with the queer unreality forced upon youngsters in grammar, in reading-content, in the adult literature they are compelled to read.

I make a plea, then, that the literature as taught in the elementary grades should abandon the too open-faced didactic motive, that it should be given to children not because it is good for them, and that it should mirror the world as they know it and can understand it. If that is done, there will be no need for the hundred and one ways teachers employ today "to put across," as the vernacular has it, a poem or a story which is dear to the teacher or the superintendent or a board of curriculum makers. Devices to compel motivation are from the beginning a confession that the thing taught is remote from the immediate interests of the child. If we are constantly to study how to induce appreciation for any given piece of literature, we might as well give up teaching literature.

This process of sweetening the bitter dose before administering it takes on many forms. In the grades it consists of going over the hard words, so-called, just before the reading proper begins, taking

up the allusions if any, and doing many other things which are supposed to ease the shock. As a matter of fact, it succeeds for the most part in making the study of literature the dullest thing in the whole school day. For the truth of the matter is that children do not need to *study* literature. Studying literature is bad enough for adults, but if adults have to do it let the adults do it. Let them respect the child's reason for reading—that it interests him, that it is another experience for him.

It is a truism to say that the most vexing phase of English teaching in the elementary school is composition. Aside from the fact that children make so many mistakes in sentences, spelling, punctuation, they have so little to say. The problem becomes a twofold one: releasing thought and feeling, and providing a technique of writing. The time-honored practice calls for a teacher-set title, some discussion of the topic beforehand, a pooling by the class, under the guidance of the teacher, of words and phrases likely to be of use in the writing, and finally the setting down of the children's ideas, whether original or acquired from the class procedure up to this point, with red-penciling by the instructor, and the final correct copy. This copy is given some sort of literal or numerical value, depending either on the teacher's judgment or upon some sort of scale devised beforehand. Most of us can quote dozens of boners from the compositions that we have had to inspect under this system. Nevertheless, for the most part the practice continues. And then we wonder why children, in numbers far too large, turn in to us in the higher grades the impossible pastiches which they call English compositions.

First of all, isn't it again a question of impossible standards being foisted upon

children who can attain only standards commensurate with their capacities and their ages? Isn't it again the same old story of adults seeking to make miniature adults out of children? If we can so organize our teaching that it will depend upon the cluster of interests and the doings and the experiences of the child at any stage in his life, if we can give the child an incentive for writing other than his desire to please the teacher and earn promotion, we have come close to a solution of the composition problem. I think it can be said without any fear of contradiction that no one willingly sits down to write, unless he is a professional, if he has no one to write to, or no need to make a record. The housewife who scribbles down the recipe for Hungarian stew, the business man who jots down the results of his week's advertising campaign, all have a motive imbedded in immediate necessity. But outside of such matters and the occasional letter we write these days, the need for writing is reduced to a minimum in our lives. In fact, most of us hate the very thought of sitting down to write anything at all. We would much rather spend the money for a telephone call than the little energy and time required to send out a post card.

This has an important bearing upon the teaching of composition, and especially in the lower grades. We have to find some means of either devising or taking advantage of situations that are the actual life of the children. That will mean that every bit of writing a child does must be in response to some personal need of his own, not to satisfy an assignment set for the whole class by the teacher. That will mean that he will not have to write unless there is some necessity for so doing and the necessity must arise from something in connection with his school work or his doings out of school. I have

known, as you have known, many children who answer advertisements in the newspapers for articles that they need. Have you ever heard of a teacher accepting such letters as part of the school work and assisting the youngsters to improve them? That is a case in point. Why cannot we, in the classroom, make similar situations, not play-acting, but real things? It would be beside the mark at this juncture to draw up a method of doing this. I think we ought not to think in terms of specific methods, but rather in terms of attitudes. If we can only establish the point of view that under no condition is composition to be considered a special topic by itself, but rather the outgrowth of life situations and needs in and out of school, the methods and practices will follow.

One other thing must be mentioned. How about formal correctness? Are we going to abolish all that? I would say emphatically *yes* if it is the teacher or the superintendent who is going to pass judgment on the expression. In general, a teacher cannot accept the child at the child's own level. He expects the child to have, in some mysterious way, some inward sense of the proprieties of good English. The child's own language is not good enough. I should say that all composition work should meet the standards of the class, be passed upon by the class, be corrected by the class. It should be connected with everything the class does, and therefore as important to the class as its discipline, its assembly programs, its standing in the school. The class displays of written work should be chosen by the children, either as a whole or in committee, the teacher being a guide and final arbiter but not the only one concerned with the correctness and the value of the efforts. This has been done, of course, in many schools, and at some time or

other in some of the classrooms, possibly in them all. But it has not been accepted that children ought to be the judges because their judgments will be based on their accomplishments, their abilities and their potentialities.

It is quite evident by now what my positive contribution to the question of teaching English in the elementary schools is going to be. I was asked to speak about the problems of teaching English in the lower grades, and I retort by saying that there is only one problem with two angles: the unreality of our practices, and the impossibility of our standards. English teaching has been for the most part a failure because we have set up too high standards and because what we teach is far removed from the lives of the children. My solution is that we reverse the practice of having adults set standards. Let the children develop standards as they go along. My solution is further to make our school practices conform to the reality of the children's lives. Our English texts must be based on situations that children understand, and must be written in language that is the children's language, the living idiom of their play and their interests. The correction of their written and spoken speech should take cognizance of the fact that there is such a thing as a language of childhood, and what is more to the point, that there is an incapacity on the part of children to understand the refinements of speech and writing as worked out by authoritarian adults. In composition the emphasis is to be, not on the completion of set assignments, but rather on such topics and such matters as form a direct, not an artificial part, of the children's immediate experiences, brought only to such perfection of statement as children judges may demand and exact, and the child author can satisfactorily achieve.

The literature of the grades should be in language suitable to youngsters, and should be in part of their own choosing, in part of their own devising, almost entirely dealing with matters within their grasp and understanding.

Now all this can be brought about only by a change in teacher attitudes and a change in teacher purposes. Our philosophy of teaching must make the child the cornerstone of education, not in the sense that we are preparing him for life, but rather in the sense that we are considering his world as it stands sufficiently rich and dignified to be employed as the basis for subject matter, for illustration, for the immediate objectives of the lesson or the unit or whatever procedure we adopt. English teachers more than any other must take this point of view as their own, because the child's world is largely a world of language. He is finding names for all the things about

him. He is busy learning definitions, not the logical ones of the dictionary, but the practical ones of reaction and adjustment. And as he goes through these various processes, he has to find a language for all his contacts, for all his visions, for all his desires and his antipathies. The child lives in the world of adults, but is enwrapped in his own too, like an Aeneas, and moves about in it with its horizons constantly expanding. The teacher is to find a way into that secret envelope of the child and work within that, not attempt to pierce it with the X-rays of an adult world. Having done that, he will find that each child can talk easily, talk freely, on levels of his own, produce his own literature, speak in the formal grammar appropriate to his age and interests. In other words, English teaching will be successful in the elementary grades only if it is an outgrowth of the immediate experiences of the child.

#### "DISARM THE HEARTS"

(Continued from page 178)

Booklet: School Correspondence  
Plan of the American Junior Red  
Cross

Committee on World Friendship  
among Children, 297 Fourth  
Avenue, N. Y.

Publications: World Friendship  
Poster — 5c; Adventures in  
World Friendship (3 projects)  
25c; Dolls of Friendship (De-  
scribes exchange of dolls be-  
tween Japan and U. S.) — 5c.

Suitcase project to children in  
Spain

International Peace League

Periodicals which contain suitable ma-  
terials

*American Observer*

*Junior Review*

*Weekly News Review*

*Red Cross Magazine*

*Junior Scholastic*

*Scholastic*

*Junior Red Cross News*

Present world conditions make it seem almost hopeless to attempt to accomplish anything in the way of establishing a feeling of friendship among the peoples of the nations. However, let us not in America lose sight of the vision of world peace; let us teach loyalty to our own country but let us not be confined to narrow nationalism; let us keep the faith that the world marches forward in the feet of little children and perhaps through that faith we shall find that we hold in our own hands the key to the ideal of world peace—

Let child love child, and strife will cease,  
Disarm the hearts,  
For that is peace.



# A Phonics Manual for Primary and Remedial Teachers

GEORGE SPACHE

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(Continued from April)

## *What to Teach*

Sartorius's study (33)<sup>1</sup> indicated that the average two-letter combination has six different pronunciations. Gates (16) found that the median number of pronunciations for the hundred most common two, three, and four-letter combinations was five. The writer has computed from Sartorius's lists that the average three or four-letter combination has 3.7 different sounds. It is apparent that the preference should be given to three and four-letter combinations if we are to attempt phonetic generalization.

Further evidence for the choice of three-letter combinations may be derived from the work of Thomson (37) and Rickard (32). Thomson says, "Grouping, even with adults, begins when six forms are presented. This fact suggests that children could be expected to perceive, with ease, words of three letters or phrases of three words." Rickard found that six-letter words proved less difficult for young children to recognize than words with four or five letters. He surmized that the reason was that six-letter words can be divided into syllables.

The studies of word perception have indicated the overwhelming importance of the initial portion of the word for total apprehension (Tinker, 40). Such studies as that of Mary Buffum Hill<sup>2</sup> indicate that the beginnings and endings of words

are most frequently observed and used as cues. The middle section of a word is seldom observed and therefore gives rise to most errors. It is apparent then that phonograms occurring in the initial or final syllable are to be preferred if we are to make use of this tendency to recognize words by means of the initial and final portions.

Some of the most frequent letter combinations in English do not form good phonograms. Reasons against their use in phonics teaching suggested by Gates (16) are:

1. Some occur in the middle of the word where they do not strike the eye forcibly, i.e. they are not convenient units of perception.
2. Some do not form natural pronunciation units, i.e.
  - a. they are part of a syllable, as *ng* in *ing*, *ar* in *ark*
  - b. they are part of two adjoining syllables, as *ni* in *phonics*
  - c. one of the letters is silent, as *ine* in *line*
  - d. they are not readily connected with spoken sounds and the associations thereby built up.

We may summarize the criteria for the selection of phonograms as follows: A phonogram

1. is preferably of three or four letters
2. occurs frequently in basic vocabularies
3. has relatively few pronunciations

<sup>1</sup>Parentetical numbers refer to the bibliography which appeared in the April number.

<sup>2</sup>Hill, Mary Buffum, "A Study of the Process of Word Division in Individuals Beginning to Read," *Journal Educational Research*, 29, March, 1936, 487-500.

4. forms a convenient and striking unit of perception, i.e. is found most frequently in initial and final syllables
5. forms a natural pronunciation or syllabic unit
6. is preferably an initial syllable.

Initial single or two-letter combinations should be included in a syllabus of phonics teaching since they serve in introducing the study. The same criteria of selection, with the exception of the first, may be applied.

Having applied similar criteria to the phonograms present in his *Reading Vocabulary for Primary Grades* (19), Gates (16) offered the following list:

ing, ter, ght, and, ick, ight, ill, low, ock, ake, ain, all, ell, ther, ver, eep, ark, hing, air, leaf, ent, ite, ook, ail, ate, ish.

He also suggests the teaching of the initial sounds st, ch, sh, ck, cl, th, tr, by, gr, wh and str.

A number of other studies of the frequency of phonograms may be cited for contrast. In 1921, Thorndike (38) noted the most frequent phonograms in the first one thousand words of his *Teacher's Word Book* (39). Vogel, Jaycox and Washburne (42) analyzed the vocabularies of 20 primers and first readers in formulating a basic list for the first two grades. They counted only vowel-consonant phonograms and initial consonants. Most of the three and four-letter phonograms were not counted. Osburn (30) found the frequency of consonant-vowel phonograms and of vowel and consonant sounds in the 2500 most common words of the *Teacher's Word Book* (39). He noted only single and two-letter combinations.

Using the same source as Osburn, Miss Atkins (2) determined the frequency of

two-letter combinations according to pronunciation, i.e., the number of times a phonogram, with a certain pronunciation, was present. In 1928, Washburne and Vogel revised their list (44) by determining the frequency of vowel-consonant phonograms, vowel sounds and initial consonants in the Gates Reading Vocabulary (19). Cordts and McBroom (6) determined the frequency of occurrence of vowels, diphthongs, initial and final consonants, and consonants in combination with other consonants in a basic word list of 2716 words derived from 42 readers ranging from the first to third grade levels. Sartorius (33) counted the frequency of all possible two, three, and four-letter combinations in a basic spelling vocabulary of 4065 words. She also noted the number of different sounds of each combination. Washburne (43) determined the one hundred "commonest syllables" in the ten thousand words of the *Teacher's Word Book* (39).

It is not necessary to repeat the complete list of each of these authors at this time. We have compared the complete lists, (with the exception of Sartorius's (33) in which the 25 most frequent two, three, and four-letter combinations were considered, and Washburne's (43) in which the syllables occurring in one hundred or more of the ten thousand words of the Thorndike list were considered) and elicited the following:

1. In two studies high frequency of occurrence was found for ad, ail, ain, ake, all, am, ap, be, ble, ca, co, con, eep, ell, em, et, ha, ick, ig, ight, ile, im, ine, io, ip, la, ne, op, ot, ot, ow (cow), ow (low), pa, ra, ri, sa, si, ter, ti, tion, ud and ur

2. In three studies ai, al, ate, ay, de, di, ee, es, est, ide, ite, le, ng, ock, on, oo, se, and wi were mentioned

3. In four studies and, at, ed, el, ent, ill, ou (out), and re were found of high frequency

4. In five or more studies an, ea (eat), en, er, in, ing, it and un were mentioned

With respect to the initial consonants, the following was found:

1. In two studies ck, dr, fl, nt, pl and y

2. In three studies pr, th (that), wh

3. In four studies cl and tr

4. In five or more studies br, ch, gr, sh, sp, st.

Application of the criteria of selection to those phonograms found of high frequency in two or more studies results in the following:

1. Phonograms of three or four letters, are: ail, ain, ake, all, and, ate, ble, con, eep, ell, ent, est, ick, ide, ight, ile, ill, ine, ing, ite, ock, ter, tion

2. Phonograms found of frequent occurrence in basic vocabularies by three or more writers are: ai, al, an, and, ar, at, ate, ay, de, di, ea (as in eat), ed, ee, el, en, ent, er, es, est, ide, ill, in, ing, it, ite, le, ng, ock, on, oo, ou (as in out), re, se, un, wi

3. Phonograms with fewer than 6 common sounds are: ai, ail, ain, ake, all, and, ate, ay, ble, di, ed, ee, eep, el, ell, em, en, er, est, ick, ight, ile, ill, im, ing, ip, ng, ock, oo, ow (cow), ow (low), ri, se, ter, ti, tion, ud, wi

4. Phonograms that ordinarily form good units of perception, i.e. are found most frequently in initial or final position (in the Gates Primary Reading Vocabulary) are: ad, ail, ain, ake, al, all, an, and, at, ate, ay, be, ca, co, con, de, di, ed, eep, ell, en, ent, er, est, et, ha, ick, ide, ight, ile, ill, in, ine, ing, ip, it, la, le, ne, ock, on, op, ot, ow

(low), pa, ra, re, ri, sa, se, si, ter, ti, tion, wi

5. Phonograms that ordinarily form a syllabic or pronunciation unit, i.e. those not ordinarily forming part of a syllable or of two adjoining syllables; not having silent letters; and those readily connected with spoken sounds—are: ad, ail, ain, al, all, and, ay, be, con, ed, eep, ell, em, en, ent, er, est, et, ick, ig, ight, ill, in, ing, it, ock, on, op, ot, ow (low), ter, tion, un, ur

6. Phonograms found most frequently in initial position (in the Gates Reading Vocabulary) are: al, be, ca, co, de, di, ha, in, la, le, ne, ou(t), pa, ra, re, ri, sa, se, si, ti, wi.

A phonics syllabus composed of phonograms that meet at least four of these criteria is:

ail, ain, al, all, and, ate, ay, con, di, ed, eep, ell, en, ent, er, est, ick, ight, ill, in, ing, ock, se, ter, tion.

Because of their frequency and importance in initiating the study of phonics, we would include the following initial combinations of consonants in the phonics syllabus: cl, tr, br, ch, gr, sh, sp and st.

Additions to this fundamental phonics syllabus may be desired by some who believe that a greater number of combinations should be taught. Although we do not concur in this belief, and do not recommend their teaching, the following list of phonograms that meet at least three of the criteria outlined herein is given for the convenience of the reader:

ai, ake, be, de, ide, ile, ine, it, ite, le, on, ow (low), re, ri, wi.

A number of the studies cited note the need for teaching the long and short sounds of the vowels and the simple consonant sounds. Because these facts are fundamental to phonetic generalization we would suggest that they be included in the phonics syllabus.

Vogel, et. al. (42), Cordts and McBroom (6) and Gillingham and Stillman (21) also suggest the teaching of the rule for lengthening the vowel sound before the final silent or "magic" *e*. We are not at all certain of the desirability of this rule owing to its many exceptions. Sartorius (33) found 248 examples of this rule and 339 exceptions in a 4065 word basic spelling vocabulary. She found 42 examples and 59 exceptions in grade one, 40 examples with 81 exceptions in grade two.

Gillingham and Stillman (21) would teach the rule that a vowel is usually long when it stands at the end of a monosyllable or an accented syllable. To our knowledge there is no evidence of the frequency of occurrence or exception to this rule in basic vocabularies. In the absence of such evidence, we cannot recommend its teaching. Cordts and McBroom (6) would also teach the rule for short vowel, i.e. when there is one vowel in a syllable, not at the end of the syllable, the vowel is short. Exceptions are such vowels followed by *r*, preceded by *w* or followed by *l* and *ll*. They would teach the rule that when there is one vowel in a stressed syllable and the vowel occurs at the end of the syllable the vowel is long, as in the second syllable of vacation. Again, the lack of evidence compels us not to recommend these rules.

Despite the fact that three and four-letter combinations were not counted by many of the writers upon whose work our syllabus is based, there are only nine two-letter combinations in the final list. We believe that if these nine are taught in final or initial position their size will not promote minute phonetic analysis, particularly if two-syllable words are employed.

*When to Teach Phonics and to Whom*

If, as is generally conceded, a mental

age of six is a prerequisite for the sight word method of learning reading, then readiness for phonics teaching must require a greater mental age. In an attempt to determine the optimum mental age for the beginning of phonics, Dolch and Bloomster (10) determined the correlation between mental age derived from the Pintner Cunningham Primary Mental Test or the Detroit First Grade Test and success in reading as measured by the Dolch-Gray Word-Attack Tests. These tests demand sounding out of the letters or phonograms of the test words in order to find the word given auditorily by the examiner. The test words are purposely similar in many details so that sight recognition is difficult.

They found correlations of .41 and .47 in the first grade, and .51 and .40 in the second grade between test score and mental age. Scattergrams made from the scores indicated that children with mental ages below seven made only chance scores. They concluded that a mental age of seven years seems to be the lowest at which a child can be expected to use phonics, in situations similar to their tests. They suggest that ear-training in noticing similarities in sounds may begin earlier.

The necessity for delaying phonics teaching is confirmed by the results of the "Newark Phonics Experiment" described by Sexton and Herron (34). They found that the teaching of phonics functioned very little or not at all with beginners in reading. It begins to be of some value during the second five months and is of still greater value in the second grade, in their opinion. Similar results were found by Garrison and Heard (15). Grace Arthur (1) found that attempts to teach phonics to children under mental ages of six and one-half proved fruitless. In fact, as early as 1908 Huey (24)



recommended delaying phonics until the child is eight or nine years old.

Prerequisites to phonics are a sight word vocabulary of 50-100 words, the establishment of the habit of thought-getting and the tendency to note gross similarities and differences in words. As stated in *Better Reading Instruction* (28), individual letters and their sounds are to be learned after the child is able to read simple material. Often children who learn easily acquire letters and their sounds incidentally, and need little special teaching. Slow learners, however, should be given the drill necessary for mastery of the alphabet.

As early as 1928, Carolyn Weaver's (45) analysis of the manuals of twenty widely used reading texts indicated that the trend in phonics teaching was toward a less detailed system of phonics taught in accordance with the needs and difficulties of the individual child.

Selection of the children for special attention in phonic training should also take into consideration the visual and auditory abilities of these children. Bond (3) found significant difference between good and poor readers in auditory acuity, discrimination and perception. He found that auditory ability was especially important in relation to reading ability when phonics teaching was employed. Fendrick (13) found that visual acuity was of significance when employing a look-say method and of little importance in phonics teaching. In other words, choice of method should be predicated, to some extent, upon presence of defects. If children are handicapped in visual characteristics the use of phonics may serve to compensate for their difficulties in sight word recognition, and conversely, if children are handicapped in auditory characteristics, the use of extensive phonics teaching is contraindicated.

### *How to Teach Phonics*

There are two general approaches to the teaching of phonics; those which make use of the initial blend or consonant-vowel phonograms and those which make use of the vowel-consonant phonograms or final blends. In the absence of complete evidence of their relative merits, the writer is not willing to favor either method to the exclusion of the other. Application of our criteria for selecting good phonograms resulted in a list of both types. We believe that this list represents the best selection of phonograms possible in the light of present-day evidence.

The general principles of method in teaching phonics are outlined in *Better Reading Instruction*:

1. Begin phonetic instruction with an analysis of the words in children's sight vocabularies.
2. Set aside separate periods for teaching phonics.
3. Teach the easiest sounds such as *m* and *s* before the difficult ones such as *b* and *p*.
4. Give different children different amounts of phonetic instruction according to their needs.
5. Adopt a definite system of phonics—of which there are several.
6. Carefully relate the work in phonics to a rich reading program.
7. In all phonetic training, deal with words as units, the teacher underlining or covering up parts of words to emphasize phonetic elements.

Elsa Lohmann's study (25) indicates that in the first grade many teachers are spending approximately ten to twenty minutes a day in supplementary phonics work. As might be expected, Tate (36) found that a thirty-minute period was too long.

Psychological facts underlying the methods of teaching phonics are:

1. Words are commonly perceived as wholes rather than by successive perception of their separate parts or letters. (Tinker, 40)

2. The initial portion of the word is the most important for visual apprehension. (Tinker, 40; Huey, 24)

3. Word length is an important factor in the determination of word form. (Tinker and Goodenough, 41)

4. Other methods of word recognition are by perception of minute characteristics of words, identification and naming of letters, phonetic translation of letters, phonetic translation of phonograms, perception by means of larger phonograms or syllables, by syllabication, by visual analysis of words and by use of context. (Gates, 16, Dickson, 9)

5. The work of Gray (22), Gates (18), Monroe (27), Gillingham and Stillman (21) and Schmitt (35), among many others, indicates that children failing in easy sight-word recognition will be helped to read by instruction in phonetic analysis.

The implications of these facts for the teacher of phonics may be summarized:

1. Children tend to perceive or recognize words in a number of ways.

2. Phonetic analysis is only one of the methods of word recognition, and should not be stressed to the exclusion of any other method. It is significant to note in this instance that phonics drill and instruction were considered the least important of six types of reading instruction in the first grade by 288 successful first grade teachers (28).

3. We should make definite use of the tendency to recognize words as

wholes. Piece-meal analysis or the recognition of a word by sounding each letter in turn is distinctly undesirable.

4. We should make definite use of the tendency to recognize words by the initial portion by employing initial consonants and phonograms as frequently as possible in our drill.

5. When teaching the sound of a particular phonogram, the words used as illustration should be of similar length and the phonogram should occur in a similar position.

6. Teaching phonetic analysis as a method of word-attack may prove of distinct value to children failing in ready sight-word recognition.

The last implication, that of the value of phonics in giving special attention to certain children may be expanded. As in spelling, the use of several methods of presentation is desirable. Impressions are strengthened by appealing to different types of imagery or memory. Several types of connections between the various sensory impressions may be established: (21)

I. Connecting visual symbol with its name and sound

Child is shown letter or phonogram in a word

"What is the name of this letter? (letters)"

Child gives name

"What does it say?"

Child sounds letter or phonogram

II. Connecting visual symbol with the writing of it

Child is shown letter or phonogram

Child writes, without looking at sample, then compares

III. Connecting writing of a letter or phonogram with its sound

Child is shown letter or phonogram

Child sounds letter or phonogram while writing or tracing it (does not look at sample while writing, however. Does, while tracing)

#### IV. Connecting name and sound

Teacher gives name of letter or the letters of phonogram

Child sounds letter or phonogram

#### V. Connecting name and written symbol

Teacher gives name of letter or letters of phonogram

Child writes letter or letter of phonogram

#### VI. Connecting sounds with written symbols

Teacher gives sound of letter or phonogram and illustrative word, e.g. *ee* as in *feed*

Child writes letter or phonogram.

There is some difference in the approach to the teaching of sounds according to whether one teaches by phonograms or by individual sound units, as in the remedial program of Gillingham and Stillman (21). This latter approach implies imparting the knowledge that a number of letters, phonograms and diphthongs have different sounds in different words. It necessitates teaching that *c* has two sounds; *s* before *e*, *i* and *y* or *k* before *a*, *o*, *u*, *l* and *r*; or teaching that *a* may appear as *a*, *ai*, *ay*, *ea*, *ei*, *eigh* or *ey*, for example.

Such a program implies much more detailed teaching of sounds and consequently a more minute phonetic analysis of words by the child. It is not recommended for all children because of the many reasons against the habits it engenders. The fact that it does help some

is told in detail in the work of Gillingham and Stillman, *Remedial Work for Reading, Spelling and Penmanship* (21).

#### *How Not to Teach Phonics*

Although implied in the positive suggestions noted above, several precautions bear reiteration. The teaching of isolated vowels or phonograms or even initial consonants is distinctly undesirable. None of these should be stressed apart from their place in specific words (11, 46).

Phonograms should not be memorized in such a stream as "ock—as in block, clock, flock, knock, lock." Such drill becomes, in effect, practice upon isolated elements, and has no greater value for reading than other articulation drills of similar type. We would question the value of the usual phonic drill card made by the teacher for oral drill by the children. Drill upon words, out of context, or apart from any indication or illustration of their meaning ignores the necessity for employing more than one method of word recognition at a time. If words containing the same letter or phonogram are to be noted, they should be contributed, insofar as is possible, by the children. Then the teacher may be certain that the words arise from the speech and, perhaps, the sight-word vocabularies of the group. All words used in phonic teaching should arise from the basic sight-word vocabulary of the texts employed in the class, if at all possible, rather than from the speech vocabulary of the teacher.

A common error in teaching phonics is the distorting of a syllable or consonant sound or overstressing so as to produce an unnatural pronunciation. Such errors as "bu-all" for "b-all," "pu-ail" for "p-ail" are examples of overstressing.

One further precaution, which we hope is unnecessary in view of the facts cited here, is that phonics is not to be

employed as the *sole* approach or the *major* approach to the teaching of reading, with the possible exception of those instances in which a child is distinctly handicapped in visual characteristics. Its place is that of a supplement to the method of teaching reading. It is to be employed only with those children that evince need of it; and to the extent that it becomes an additional method of word-attack for these children.

#### *Summary*

The following summation is offered:

*Purposes of Phonics Teaching:* To assist the child in acquiring an additional method of word-attack.

*Extent of Phonics Teaching:* Still widely used as supplementary method in primary grades and as a method in remedial work.

*Results of Phonics Teaching:* May cause minute word-analysis or letter-by-letter reading with loss of speed, comprehension and interest if used as sole method. Will aid child in word-attack if used as supplement to other natural methods employed by the child.

*Arguments Against Phonics Teaching:* May be answered by careful choice of materials of instruction and attention to relevant psychological facts and principles of learning.

*What to Teach:* A syllabus of phonograms and initial consonants is derived from the application of six criteria of selection to earlier lists.

*When to Teach Phonics and to Whom:* Delay phonics until mental age of six and a half or seven. Prepare by teaching sight-word vocabulary of 50-100 words, establishing habit of thought-getting, and by training children in noting similarities and differences in sounds and words. Teach only those children that need it. Note presence of sensory defects in selecting children for special attention.

*How to Teach Phonics:* Base upon sight-word vocabulary of children. Use separate periods of 10-15 minutes. Deal with words as units. Use words of similar length and those in which the phonograms occur in similar position. Teach phonograms in initial position or syllable if possible. Establish a number of sensory connections. Integrate work with reading program.

*How Not to Teach Phonics:* Do not teach phonics to exclusion of other methods of word-attack. Do not teach phonograms in isolation. Do not teach phonograms in medial position. Do not overstress syllable or consonant sound so as to produce unnatural pronunciation.

Other summaries of current practices in the teaching of phonics are offered by Freeman, Gray, and Breed (14), Cordts and McBroom (6), *Better Reading Instruction* (28), Dickson (9) and Weaver (45).



# Vocabulary Problems in the Elementary School

## A Digest of Current Research

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(Continued from April)

### INTRODUCTION

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this bulletin is three-fold: (a) To present some of the major findings of research dealing with elementary school vocabulary. (b) To generalize concerning those findings, stating in general the areas in which authentic information is available. (c) To point out fields in which more research is definitely and urgently needed.

#### IMPORTANCE OF THE PROBLEM.

##### ITS SEVERAL ASPECTS

Apart from the fact of present interest in vocabulary, the topic in and of itself is of antecedent importance. More than lists of words is included in this problem. More than simple tabulation is requisite if the problem of vocabulary is to be considered adequately and comprehensively. We should be interested not only in the question of how or what words children or adults have been found to use in defined circumstances, but also in the problems of how and why those words were used, and how ability in word usage develops under varying conditions and in various fields. Without discounting the great value of the kinds of word lists mentioned above, or other and equally valuable listings of words found in certain specimens of English writing and the like, this committee wishes to emphasize and re-emphasize the stand that vocabulary and word usage are important fields for study and research apart from the more or less abstract interests represented by listings. It is important to know how

children grow in every phase of language development. It is important to realize that a child's ability to read, to speak, to write, and to think are inevitably conditioned by his vocabulary, and by vocabulary is meant here the words which can be understood. If that kind of vocabulary is increased, ideas are extended at the same time, and vice versa. If one thinks of "vocabulary" as being inclusive in that sense, to establish its importance requires no argument.

In this connection may it be stated that full consideration of vocabulary problems includes these aspects:

#### 1. *Writing Vocabulary*

This includes, properly, the words one has used in writing. Conceivably, it might include also the words one could use, but for purposes of tabulation the former is the only practical approach. Obviously, this is closely associated with problems of spelling, especially with the problem of determining which words pupils should be taught to spell. Many of the studies investigated have concerned themselves with these questions.

#### 2. *Reading Vocabulary*

Strictly speaking, this includes only those words which a person can read or has read. But by legitimate extension it includes also those words which he is likely to meet in normal reading activity. It includes a statement of words most frequently used in ordinary written English and also a statement of the technical demands met in specialized fields. Much excellent work deals with this problem.

### 3. *Speaking Vocabulary*

Especially in dealing with children does one find discrepancies between speaking, reading, and writing vocabularies. In each instance demands, stimuli, and governing conditions change. The mechanical difficulties of investigating spoken vocabulary comprehensively are obvious. Yet the problems are of great importance. There have been some promising approaches and some definite accomplishments in this area, but the results, to date, have been limited.

### 4. *Potential Vocabulary*

This aspect of vocabulary is highly important, yet comparatively little has been done with it. The potential vocabulary of an individual (sometimes called "marginal vocabulary") includes words which that individual does not know, has not met, but which he could interpret accurately either through context or because of his background of general knowledge. Knowledge of prefixes, suffixes, and roots contributes to potential vocabulary. Knowledge of languages other than English contributes to one's potential English vocabulary. Knowledge of Latin contributes to a potential vocabulary in any language which includes Latin derivatives. The precise extent of the potential vocabulary of any individual is literally impossible of determination. But methods of acquiring a potential vocabulary, and ability to translate a potential into an active vocabulary can be studied. Some studies have thrown at least a little light on this.

### 5. *Semantics and Inflectional Variants*

The fact that many English words have multiple meanings is no strange<sup>1</sup> or novel discovery; students of the language have written about that for years. But the thought seems to have come as a flash

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Ogden, C. K., and Richards, I. A. *The Meaning of Meaning*. Harcourt Brace & Co., New York, 1923. Cf. also Bishop Trench, *On Words*. For that matter, the advice of Socrates, to agree concerning definitions before arguing, is quite pertinent.

from the blue to many. In fact, in the last year or two, a number of publications have rather popularized the topic. In elementary education the problem has by no means received adequate attention. Almost equally slighted has been the kindred problem of inflectional variants. Some studies have been conducted, and at least one very considerable study is now in progress, dealing with problems coming from semantic differences and inflectional variants of English words.

### 6. *How Vocabulary Is Best Built*

This involves several subsidiary factors. The relationship, if any, which exists between vocabulary status, sex, intelligence, and other variables; methods to be employed; by-products to be utilized; problems of special subjects or field of knowledge or interest are all related to the problem of method. The matter of testing is allied, because growth should be measured. In each of these directions some research has been accomplished.

#### THE METHOD EMPLOYED

In the preparation of this bulletin it was attempted to survey the field completely. The usual indices were consulted for published materials. Letters were written to the librarians of all universities listed as having graduate schools, asking if the libraries contained pertinent unpublished studies. Similar letters were enclosed in order that the librarian might transmit them to interested faculty members. Letters of inquiry were sent to all city research division workers listed in the A.E.R.A. membership list. In addition, a great many persons were approached through conversation or personal letters. Of all the letters sent only five were not answered.

The unpublished studies which had not been digested in some publication, as well as many which had been so treated, were borrowed from the university libraries excepting in certain rare instances in

which the library, usually because only one copy had been deposited, could not lend the material. In some of these cases abstracts were secured. The others were, perforce, disregarded. Published materials were read. The year 1925 was set as an arbitrary starting point, because current research is emphasized. However, some important and enduring studies done before that date were included.

The following material does not include reference to or citations from all of the studies read. It is eclectic in its approach, using these studies which, because of their unique or significant contributions, seemed to offer most. For the selection, as for the omissions, the committee must take full responsibility.

In the following sections of this monograph, studies have been grouped in more or less arbitrary fashion. It is quite true that many of these studies might have been listed under different headings from those under which they appear. It is further recognized that many of these studies could be listed under several captions. The arrangement which follows is by no means absolute, nor is it intended to be precise. That arrangement was adopted which seemed best calculated to serve the immediate purpose.

## I. THE COMPILATION OF LISTS

Many of these investigations are chiefly concerned with the statement of lists of words suitable for spelling. This study is not primarily concerned with spelling and makes no attempt to comment upon all of the spelling list investigations. However, because some of these investigations are exceedingly pertinent as they apply to vocabulary per se they are presented here.

One of the earliest was Jones' *Concrete Investigations of the Materials of English Spelling* (112).<sup>2</sup> Employing

<sup>2</sup> Parenthetical numbers refer to items in the bibliography, which appeared in the April number.

1050 pupils in grades two to eight Jones asked each child to write successive themes until no new words were discovered in the last theme of any one pupil. Estimating the running words at 15,000,000 he reported 4532 words used by two or more per cent of the pupils. On this basis he listed words presumably most useful for writing, introducing some aspects of grade distribution. His main interest was in spelling; consequently many aspects of the vocabulary are probably absent in the findings.

For vocabulary this study has dual significance: first, it directed attention toward the fact that the vocabulary of children should be investigated and also toward the disparity between running words and different words; second, the widespread recognition of the insufficiency of stimulation called general attention to another important aspect of vocabulary research.

The following investigations also serve to show how few different words, relatively, are found in a large number of running words. While all of them do not treat the vocabulary of children, all of them are important.

L. P. Ayers (6) in an early study of personal and business letters found 2001 different words among 23,629 running words. This was one of the first studies to point out the extent to which multiple repetitions of a few common words comprise large proportions of words used. *I*, *and*, and *the* made up one-eighth of all running words. Five hundred and forty-two words made up seven-eighths of all the words tabulated. This study stimulated a great deal of research.

Cook and O'Shea (41) studied the correspondence of thirteen adults, some college graduates, some persons of little schooling. In 200,000 running words 5200 different words were found. Cook and O'Shea did not tabulate inflectional

forms separately, but this early study was quite useful in its day in pointing out the comparative infrequency with which many words included in spelling lists were actually used.

Anderson (3) studying 3723 letters written by individuals representing 35 occupations, tabulated 9223 different words in 361,184 running words. Of the different words 3217 were found only once. Because Anderson's subjects were representative of many occupations and levels of education, the study is valuable in spite of the fact that all his subjects lived in one state.

W. F. Clark (36) analyzed 200 letters written to a Chicago paper, finding 3360 different words among 28,292 running words. The people who wrote these letters are likely to have been a group above the average educational level. Clark found 117 words in the Ayres list of 1000 words missing in his list, and something over 200 in his list were not in the Ayres' list, indicating somewhat obvious limitations of both lists.

Tidyman (230), in a study based upon 5000 themes written by Connecticut school children in grades three to nine, found 3850 different words in a total of 538,500 running words. In his tabulation Tidyman eliminated a number of common words. Comparing his investigation with previous investigations, Tidyman attempted to determine in groups of 1000 the 3000 most common words used by children in writing themes.

Ernest Horn's (101,103,104) researches have been most significant among studies designed to elicit the words most useful for writing and spelling. In 1919 Horn combined the words of all correspondence studies which had been made up to that time. As new investigations were made available they were added to this compilation. After compiling something over 850,000 words

he received a special grant from the Commonwealth Fund enabling him to expand the investigation. Analyses were made of personal correspondence; of letters written by people of superior education; of letters of application and recommendation; of certain other adult uses such as minutes, resolutions, and committee reports. Horn utilized some 65 different sources and applied appropriate weightings to give each word proper position. Investigation employed over 5,000,000 running words, over 36,000 different word forms. From this complete list Horn selected 10,005 words including inflectional variations which his weighting system indicated were most significant. Five were arbitrarily discarded.

Grace McKee (142,143), in a study of 180 themes written by sixth grade children, found 2329 different words in 18,958 running words. An important phase of Mrs. McKee's investigation is that she allowed the children to select from 387 theme topics. It will be noted that although she tabulated relatively few running words she found relatively many different words. The study shows us how important is the stimulus. This approach deserves more attention. Mrs. McKee exercised great care. The extent of the investigation is much greater than that of most parallel studies.

Of course the statement of what words children should spell does not answer the question of when children should be taught these words. Horn as well as others has remarked that there are two incompatible factors involved, that of immediate need, and that of difficulty. The studies of children's usage show us that children at any grade level may be expected to use many different words, even though it is possible to determine the two to four thousand words used most frequently. To what extent vocabulary development and spelling accu-



acy should accompany each other has never been determined. Obviously the question of grade placement of spelling words is allied to this problem. Wise (256) in a study of twenty spellers and Selke (194) in a study of ten spellers found the initial grade placement of words quite variable. By comparing spelling scales and by testing, Wise found a great deal of disagreement between difficulty and grade placement. Dolch (56, 57), in an excellent study of graded vocabularies, located many more words in lower grades than did certain other writers and points out the difficulty of locating words except approximately.

For the past several years Garver (81) has been analyzing spellings of each of the words in the Commonwealth List by some 80,000 children in grades two to eight. In addition, he is analyzing certain vocabulary aspects found in some thousands of papers and letters secured by Seegers in a previous study. Dr. Garver is attempting to determine what words should be assigned to specific grades and to secure evidence of disabilities in spelling upon which methodology might be predicated.

Kellor (115) in a study of second grade children states that spelling needs were found to be largely individual. The study is suggestive, but not conclusive.

Caraway (31) analyzed and compared eight vocabulary lists, including Horn's, to select a spelling vocabulary suitable for first and second grade children. Using certain criteria stated by Dr. Horn in his article, "Primary Spelling," and the lists themselves, she names 75 words deemed suitable for grade one, 250 for grade two. Kellor's study of course tends to discount the validity of such a list in spite of the care taken by Caraway. Of course neither of these studies proves that formal spelling is required or desirable in grades one and two.

Breed (22) found 7035 different words in five studies of children's themes, and 9057 different words in eleven studies of adult writing. Of these words 4598 were common to both lists, which fact Breed seems to think suggests rather complete dichotomy. In studying the extent to which children's writing and adult's writing agreed Breed discovered closer agreement in vocabulary than in spelling skill. The greatest differences he found were in spelling errors. However, many words rarely used by adults were found in all of the lists derived from children's writing; many words used frequently by adults were not in many of the children's lists.

There does seem to be a real difference between child usage and adult usage, but it must be pointed out that in the case of neither group does Breed have complete information. As McKee (144) says, Breed did not have the information enabling him to "make a comparison between the 5000 words used most commonly by children" and the 5000 used most frequently by adults. The study is valuable in that it considers both children's and adults' writing but on such bases it is not possible to generalize too widely. The fact is that about 50% agreement was found in the lists studied. Studies reported subsequently present further evidence of the relation between children's and adults' vocabularies.

Mrs. Grace McKee found only 1475 words common to four out of five investigations compared. Breed's list of 7035 different words was evolved from the millions of running words reported in five previous studies.

Coleman (40) combined seventeen word lists and sixteen lists from spelling texts in an attempt to evolve a reliable spelling list. He eliminated words found in less than fifteen sources, certain other words found in fifteen sources but not

less than five of the research lists, and all other words found in fewer than three research lists, arriving at a list of 3017 words. The study is useful, but Coleman unfortunately did not provide any weighting system.

Coleman agrees with Breed that there is a difference between the writing vocabulary of children and that of adults.

In all of these studies the real point is that the lists are certainly incomplete reports of the words children use in school writing, even less complete reports

of the total possible writing vocabulary of children, and even more incomplete suggestions of the vocabulary children might develop. They tell us nothing about how vocabulary development should be approached. These statements are made because there have been many misinterpretations of these lists. In fairness to the investigators themselves it should be stated that they seem much more cognizant of the limitations of their studies than do some of the people who attempt to apply them.

## SHOP TALK

### The Textbook Clinic\*

To provide a common meeting ground and to promote an interest in improved textbook design among many people interested in the production of such books, the American Institute of Graphic Arts arranged for the organization of a group, now known as the Textbook Clinic, that should devote itself exclusively to the consideration of textbooks. The first meeting of the Textbook Clinic was held in February, 1938. Interest was keen and has mounted steadily. Publishing executives, editors, and designers; textbook typographers, printers, and binders; authors, illustrators, and others are among the membership.

It will be the task of the Textbook Clinic to demonstrate to all who are concerned with the production and use of textbooks, what constitutes good makeup or design, and how it can be achieved; and to make evident its cultural, educational, and sales value. It is the contention of the Textbook Clinic that improving the design of textbooks does not necessarily imply an increase in the cost per copy; that improvement can come through more intelligent planning rather than through an increase in manufacturing expenses.

The Textbook Clinic believes that good textbook design is a sound investment, for beauty can be sold more easily than ugliness. Textbooks are sold in free competition with other textbooks, and it is beginning to be

\*Excerpts from an address before the Conference on Textbook Problems, American Association of School Administrators, Cleveland, Ohio, February, 1939.

evident that an attractive format is an important element of sales value.

But this is not the only reason for the improvement of textbooks, nor, I hope, the most important one. There are at least two others, both of which have to do with the effect upon the student.

A lively-looking textbook helps to break down the resistance of any normal child to study from textbooks. As textbooks become more attractive, children will enjoy their education more, and education will improve.

But, furthermore, we believe it is well worth while to develop our children's sensitive imaginations by including in all their textbooks the touch of beauty that will quicken their perception of cultural or aesthetic excellence, not only in books, but in all other things as well.

This Clinic will sponsor a Textbook Exhibition which will open at the New York Public Library in May and from there will go on tour to the various important cities throughout the nation.

—J. KENDRICK NOBLE

*President, Noble and Noble, Publishers*

EDITOR'S NOTE: Information concerning the Textbook Exhibit, to which Mr. Noble refers, may be secured from The American Institute of Graphic Arts, 115 East 40th Street, New York City.

# Recent Books for Boys and Girls

J. L. CERTAIN

## FICTION FOR OLDER CHILDREN

**The Boy Who Lived on London Bridge.** By Rupert Sargeant Holland. Illus. by Peter Quinn. Macrae Smith Company, 1938. \$2.00.

This is Giles Lytton's story, and it never once weakens its hold on the reader. Here is adventure in late sixteenth-century England. Among the characters are Kit Marlowe, Queen Elizabeth, and Sir Francis Drake. Perhaps one of the most delightful qualities of the book to the young reader will be the plausibility of incident that the narrative unerringly gives. Even the machinations of the sourcerer seem plausible. The illustrations add to the adventurous and romantic atmosphere. An excellent book for older boys.

**Bright Morning.** By Charlie May Simon. Illus. by Howard Simon. Dutton, 1939. \$2.00.

Written in the gentle tradition of *Little Women*, this book tells of the Gill family of Memphis, in the 1900's: the father, who owns a bookstore, the mother, who works secretly to help the family finances, the daughters, and the son. Each of the children is individualized, and the simple day-to-day happenings of this affectionate household make absorbing and wholesome reading for girls. An excellent and much-needed book, in these days when many children are unfamiliar with the kind of home life described here.

**Shuttered Windows.** By Florence Crannell Means. Illus. by Armstrong Sperry. Houghton Mifflin, 1938. \$2.00.

The story concerns the adjustment of a sixteen-year-old Negro girl, educated in a large, well-equipped northern high school, to the life of one of the islands off the South Carolina coast. Harriet is shocked by the poverty and primitive life on the islands, but the brave efforts of her race to better its conditions finally enlist her sympathy and active help.

Excellent characterization, good plot, the ever-popular boarding-school theme, romance, and mystery combine to make the book enthralling.

The author steadfastly shows essential likeness of humans, the similarity of their reactions under like circumstances, in a way that should increase inter-racial understanding.

A really distinguished novel for older girls.

## STORIES FOR THE MIDDLE GRADES

**Pixie on the Post Road.** By Eleanor Hubbard Wilson. Illus. by the author. Dutton, 1939. \$2.00.

The setting is an old inn on the Boston Post Road, in the early 1800's. One Halloween, a baby girl is left on the inn door-step, and each Halloween thereafter, a bag of gold. The mystery of Pixie's identity, and the jolly times at the old inn make a pleasant little story. The author's drawings, and the fine map on the end-papers, add enjoyment.

**Adventure May Be Anywhere.** By Ruth Manning-Saunders. Illus. by Mary Shephard. Stokes, 1938. \$1.75.

This is a story of the summer holiday, in Cornwall, of four English children. In unfolding the story, the author brings her characters to life. Plot and personality unite to make this a delightful book, and technically, one of the best-written books of the year.

The adventures of the children are the kind that almost any child-reader would delight to share. Some of them are escapades; some real difficulties; but all are the result of the strong personalities, and eager minds of the four children.

**Pioneer Girl.** The Early Life of Frances Willard. By Clara Ingram Judson. Illus. by Genevieve Foster. Rand McNally, 1939. 50c.

This story of a frontier family makes interesting reading, for the author selects the high moments of the children's lives—the first meal in the new home, the games, "clubs," and escapades. That one of the characters is the great Frances Willard makes the book doubly interesting. The story ends at Frances's eighteenth birthday, but an afterword lists some of Miss Willard's achievements.

## STORIES FOR LITTLE CHILDREN

**William and His Kitten.** By Marjorie Flack. Illus. by the author. Houghton Mifflin, 1938. \$1.00.

Among stories for little children, this is outstanding for its well-knit plot. It is generously illustrated, pleasantly realistic, and, to adult readers, at least, humorous. An excellent book.

**Epaminondas and His Auntie.** By Sara Cone Bryant. Illus. by Inez Hogan. Houghton Mifflin, 1938. 75c.

Here's the immortal Epaminondas back, with pictures by Inez Hogan. What more could anyone ask? A "must" for librarians and primary teachers.

**Nicodemus and the Gang.** By Inez Hogan. Illus. by the author. Dutton, 1939. \$1.00.

Miss Hogan understands children, and records their doings and interests with almost mathematical accu-

acy. Nicodemus is better and more widely known than any flesh-and-blood child, and so will be the other members of the gang. In this story, the gang build a club-house, despite Li'l Sister's sabotage.

**Frankie.** By Helen and Alf Evers. Rand McNally, 1939. 50c.

Here is a book that many second-graders can read for themselves. Frankie is a jolly little dog who wags his tail continually. There is a fine, gay picture of Frankie on every right-hand page, with only a few lines of text facing it. The story is a real story, too, with a tiny plot and a joke at the end. The book should be a favorite.

**San Bao and His Adventures in Peking.** By Mirian Cannon. Illus. by the author. Dutton, 1939. \$1.50.

Because Lu is a stubborn little donkey, San Bao is separated from his father at the Peking fair. In his efforts to find his father, he encounters adventure. Interesting description of a Chinese fair, but rather slow reading for a child.

**Rufie Had a Monkey!** By Elizabeth Hough Sechrist. Illus. by Hestermay Janeway. David McKay, 1939. \$1.00.

Rufie lived with Mammy in a two-room apartment in Harlem, where Widda the monkey, would have been a good deal of trouble even if he hadn't been a "scamp o' misery," as Mammy calls him. Even so, Rufie and Mammy love Widda, and are sad when it appears that he must be sold. Just in time, this is averted. The pictures enlarge upon the story with unusually pleasant effect. Perhaps the author overdoes the dialect a little, but aside from this, the book is an interesting addition to children's literature.

**Mr. Heinie and Scroot.** By Aldarilla S. Beistle. Illus. by Mary Alice Beistle. David McKay, 1939. \$1.00.  
When Scroot, a shivering little mongrel comes to

Mr. Heinie's house and is fed, Mr. Heinie (a dignified dachshund) resents it. Mr. Heinie's change of heart, and his rescue of Scroot make an amusing story for third and fourth grades. The pictures are as good as the text.

## POETRY AND DRAMA

**More Silver Pennies.** By Blanche Jennings Thompson. Illus. by Pelagie Doane. Macmillan, 1938.

Part one of this book is for young readers. Birthdays, fairies, animals, the weather, and the seasons are represented in the lyrics in this section. Older children are considered in the second half of the book. Here the poetry is more subtle, more provocative of thought, more kindling to imagination.

Miss Thompson's collection is distinguished by the technical excellence of the poems included, by their fine imagery, and by the fact that many of them are as unfamiliar as they are lovely. Too many anthologies are compiled from other anthologies. This one steps out in fresh garments. The brief comments introducing the poems, like quiet remarks by an understanding friend, encourage, but do not demand enjoyment.

**Theatre for Children.** By Winifred Ward. Drawings by Charles Vance. D. Appleton-Century, 1939. \$3.00.

This book is so refreshingly practical, and so inclusive, that it should be invaluable to every director of dramatics and auditorium work.

After a brief discussion of the history of the children's theatre, Miss Ward devotes a chapter to organization (in which she gives some shrewd advice), then takes up the matter of plays, the direction of plays (casting, rehearsals, costuming, scenery); production, advertising, financing. Finally, there is an excellent list of plays, followed by a classified list of plays suitable for camps, church schools, and children's theatres.



# Editorial

## The Way to Peace Through the Schools

THE ONE HOPEFUL element in the present world situation is the indomitable desire for peace. This so far has proved stronger than the forces back of the aggressors and all of the disturbers of peace. Even though war does come now, it may still be said that never before has world diplomacy shown such an iron will for peace and under circumstances that in the past would surely have flamed into war.

History is filled with records of hair trigger pretexts that have led to wars. Bismarck is said to have fabricated a single telegram that started the Franco-German war of 1870; an assassin's bullet plunged European nations into the World War in 1914. But it was Woodrow Wilson's policy of watchful waiting that presaged the dawn of the new era.

Today, in the minds of thoughtful men, war is as clearly outlawed as dueling. All that remains to reduce wars to a minimum is the development of a sufficiently strong sentiment among the nations of the world to deal with war as any heinous crime, and to remove the perpetrators from the peaceful ways of life just as all criminals are disposed of.

Patience will be required to bring civilization to the point where it can successfully deal with this problem. Nevertheless, the fact that war is now recognized as the most hideous of all crimes is the significant thing to educators. The academic debate between pacifists and militarists seems nearing a close at last. All sides are now uniting in pacts to stop wars.

But an understanding of the real significance of this new stand for peace must

be taught by teachers. Here is no task for sentimentalists. The child, despite all his potential virtues, has great capacity for pugnaciousness, for hatred, and for evil doing. He must be educated to find his way through the world peacefully.

This means that teaching is to be given a test of iron. Shallowness, superficiality, and sham will fail. Children must live their lives to full measure in the school, and with full accountability, too, to one another and to society. The selfish young leader, the mendacious little braggart, the small potential criminal must be met by curbing and by corrective measures. Children must be taught to settle differences, and to arbitrate disputes with words rather than with bare knuckles.

While it is true that children vary in their individual capacities for right or wrong, and in their individual predilections for good or evil, they are all responsible agents in their maturing lives, and must be so regarded by the conscientious teacher. In the schools, then, children must be practised in neighborly ways; they must be restrained in their antagonisms.

Education is the active principle of social life. It is a matter of living the good life. School children must learn to settle their disputes out of court. Ordinary oral composition then becomes extraordinary in the sense that it serves all alike as a medium of personal and social adjustment. Children who are in the school today learning to settle all differences without resort to force are the citizens of the world tomorrow. They will know how to live the peaceful life. To them war will become unknown.

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★

**Appraisal of Newer Elementary School Practices.** By J. Wayne Wrightstone. 221 pp. Cloth \$2.25.

Extends the scope of Dr. Wrightstone's earlier volume, “Appraisal of Newer Practices in Selected Public Schools,” by presenting a wealth of new material on practices and educational objectives. In simple, non-technical language the author compares the conventional with the newer type of elementary schools.

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**Graphs as a Means of Instruction in the First Four Grades of the Elementary School.** By Ruth G. Strickland, Ph.D. 172 pp. Illus. Cloth \$1.85.

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